

BULGARIA

ILLUSTRATED HISTORY



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Bulgaria

BOJIDAR DIMITROV

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*Man dies,
even though he lives nobly,
and another is born.
And let the latest born,
seeing this,*



*remember him
who made it. The name
of the ruler is
Omurtag, the Sublime khan...*

From a ninth-century inscription
on the Column of khan Omurtag
now at Veliko Tarnovo


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INTRODUCTION

The historical development of the Bulgarian lands and the people that inhabited them in the antiquity has been determined by one major factor — their crossroads situation between Europe and Asia. The waves of settlers that swept from both continents into the south or into the north at different times, quite often turned the plains of Thrace, Moesia, Macedonia and the Balkan mountains into an arena of fierce clashes. Prior to the settlement of the Bulgarians about fifteen hundred years ago, this most contended land of the European civilization had seen other people's cultures, with markedly impressive presence in the history of humankind on the planet Earth come, evolve and then, tragically go.

The earliest traces of human life on the Bulgarian lands date back to Paleolithic and Mesolithic times. The brilliant drawings in some Bulgarian caves and the flint labour tools are the only remnants of the primitive man, the *homo sapiens* forebearer.

The emergence of *homo sapiens* in the lands of present-day Bulgaria seems to have taken place only about two thousand years after his initial appearance in the lands between Mesopotamia and Palestine. As to their nature and geographic situation, the Bulgarian lands are close to the so-called 'optimal natural environment' which is a prerequisite for man to come out of the caves and for the formation of the first agricultural and cattle-breeding communities that subsisted no longer on hunting and on wild fruit-collecting, but on a premeditated production of food and goods. Groups of people started settling down all over the lands of present-day Bulgaria,

Prohodna - one of the dozens of Bulgarian caves - the primitive man's abode.

Bronze Age cliff carvings at the Magura cave, depicting men, women and animals during observance of rituals of cult.





mainly in river valleys and in coastal regions. It was there that the people of the Neolithic were able to benefit from the magnificent natural wealth: rivers, rivulets and streams, fertile and easily cultivated lands, rock and clay deposits, vast forests and pastures. The one-thousand-year-long life of those settlements in the same place has brought about enormous piles of debris and other household waste, known as 'settlement mounds'.

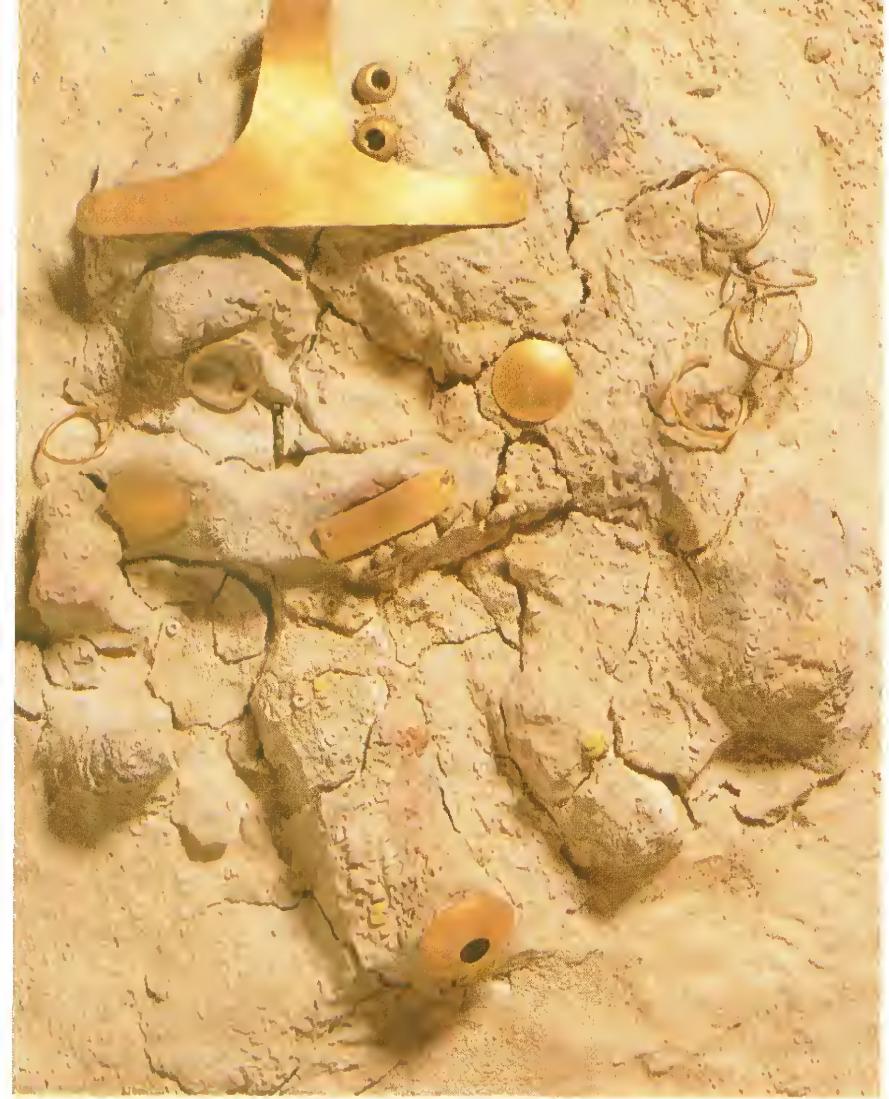
The introduction of metals gave further impetus to the development of human civilization in the lands between the Danube and the Aegean Sea in the IV-II millennia BC. As evident from the archeological excavations, copper production and, subsequently, that of bronze and precious metals were rather impressive for the scale of that remote epoch. These were concentrated in the Bulgarian lands rich in copper-containing ores. The analysis of the metal tools and the unprocessed pieces of metal found in various regions of

Hollow idol head found at Popovo near Turgovishte; end of V millennium BC.

Mid-Neolithic pottery vessel found on a hillock near the village of Karanovo, Sliven region.

Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlement mound at the village of Yunatsite, Pazardjik area.





Clay mask adorned with golden objects; unearthed from grave no.3 in a late Chalcolithic necropolis near Varna; IV millennium BC.

Neolithic necropolis at Varna; four millennium BC. The find comprises over three thousand gold items; including insignia — symbols of power, the earliest in the world, uncovered to this day.

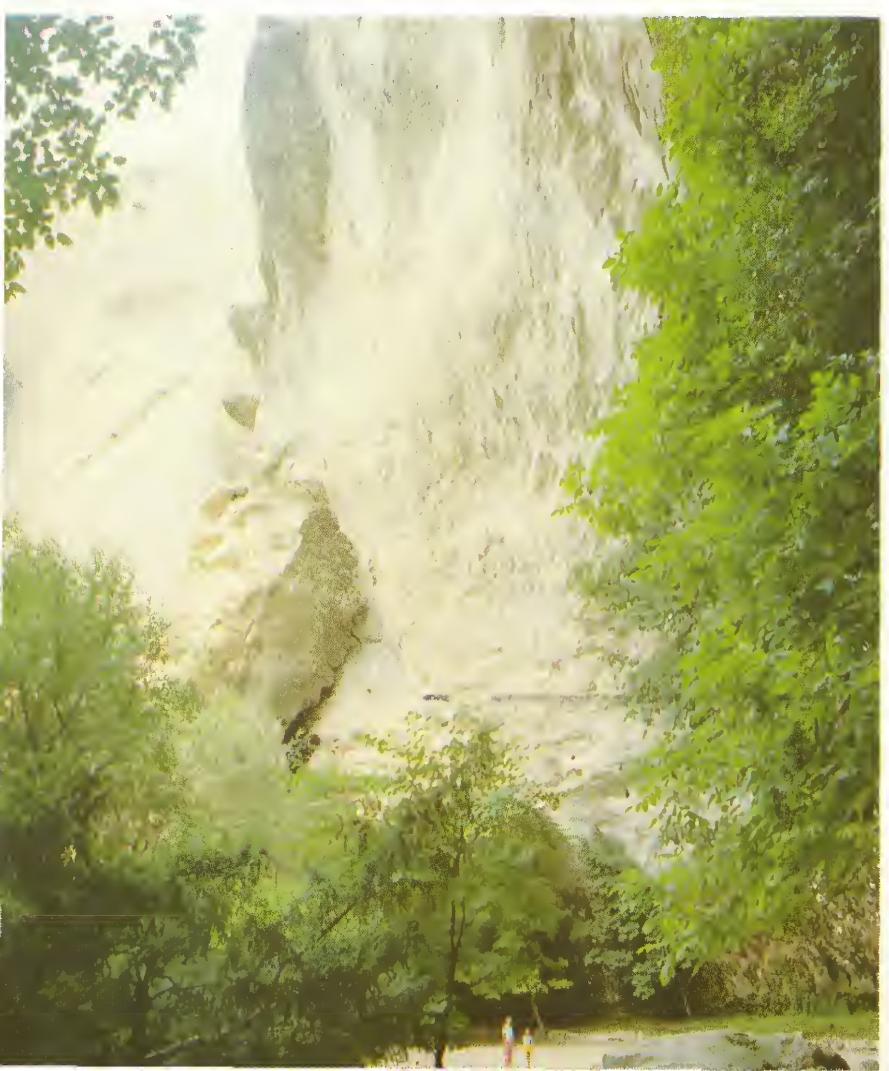
Impressive cult-symbolizing cliff at Madara, Shumen region.

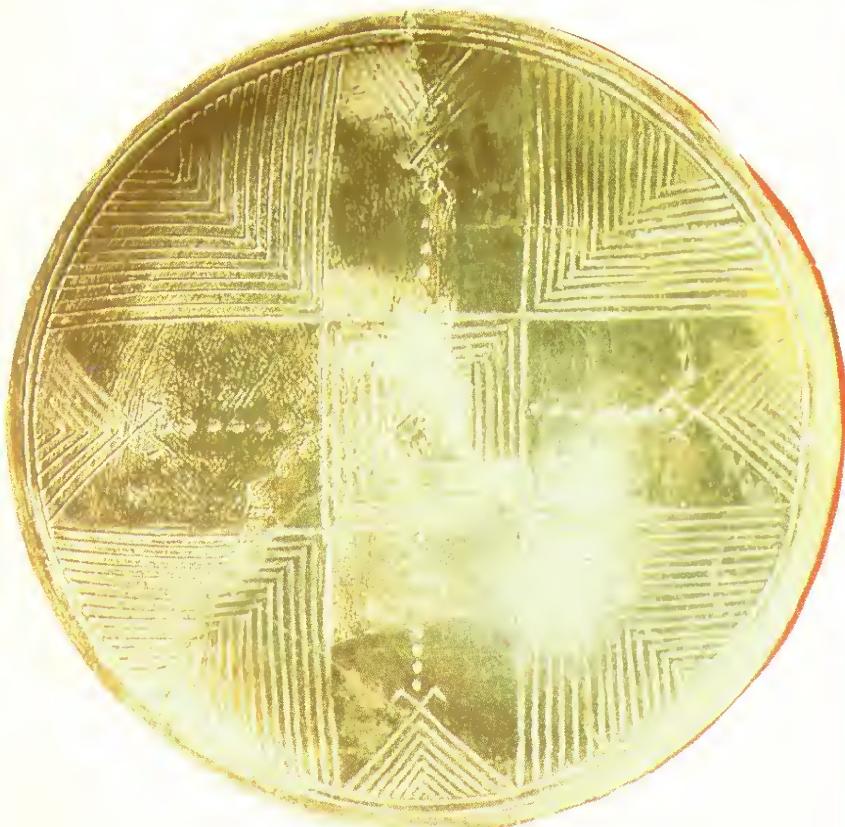
Late Chalcolithic cult scene from the settlement mound at the village Ovcharovo, Turgovishte region.



Central, Eastern and Southern Europe has come to show that these were made of metals produced in the Bulgarian lands, i.e. a considerable part of this production was export-oriented.

Improved living conditions caused an abrupt population increase in this part of the European continent. However, the demographic boom was not only a consequence of growing birth-rate, dropping death-rate or longevity, but also a result of mechanic influx of human groups from the south (Asia Minor) and from the north (the middle Danube tableland, the Carpathians, the northern Black Sea littoral). This process had certainly been accompanied by clashes resulting from the endeavour to lay hands on the more fertile regions, on the ore deposits, etc. It is hard to trace the ethnic changes in that epoch of illiteracy for the whole of humanity. One fact is safe to say though: towards the middle of the II millennium BC the features of the Thracian ethnic community have begun





Early Chalcolithic clay pot with its inside grooved with geometrically designed decorations.



Settlement mound at Karanovo village. The cultural evolution of the hamlet during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods and the Bronze Age helped to elaborate the Karanovo Chronography.





Nest of golden, copper and clay vessels, dated somewhere between the tenth and the seventh centuries BC.

Grave no.43 within the Neolithic necropolis at Varna.

Gold-decorated pottery vessel found in grave no.4 within the Neolithic necropolis at Varna.

shaping up. This was the people predestined to inhabit the Bulgarian lands until the appearance of the Bulgarians and the subsequent formation of the Bulgarian state.





THE THRACIANS

The boundaries of the Thracian ethnos comprise not only the territory of present-day Bulgaria but also the land of present-day Romania, Eastern Serbia, Northern Greece and Northwestern Turkey. According to the Greek historian Herodotus (5th century BC) the Thracians were the most numerous people in Europe and came second in the world after the Indians (obviously the world Herodotus knew).

Regrettably, during their 2000-year-long history the Thracians have not created an alphabet of their own. The reconstruction of the past of this people — builder of one of the pillars of the ancient European civilization, has been based on the scanty information available in the literary tradition of Hellenians and Romans and, naturally, on the results obtained from the particularly large-scale archeological excavations carried out over the past three or four decades.

Without doubt the basis of the Thracian economy during the first centuries of the development of the Thrace people had been the production of foodstuffs, raw materials and other goods which fully satisfied the local needs, leaving considerable quantities for exports in all directions. The Thracian export is particularly easy to trace in the southeastern and southern directions, i.e. the trade routes leading to the peoples inhabiting Asia Minor, the Middle East and the Aegian Sea region. The exchange of merchandise was chiefly carried out by sea through the ports of Thrace, Phoenicia, Egypt, Caria, Crete and Mycenae. This inevitably led to active ex-

Portion of the painted scenes in the dome of the Thracian tomb at Kazanluk, in the Valley of Roses; fourth century BC.

Bronze coin showing the Thracian ruler Sevтum III (323-311 BC).

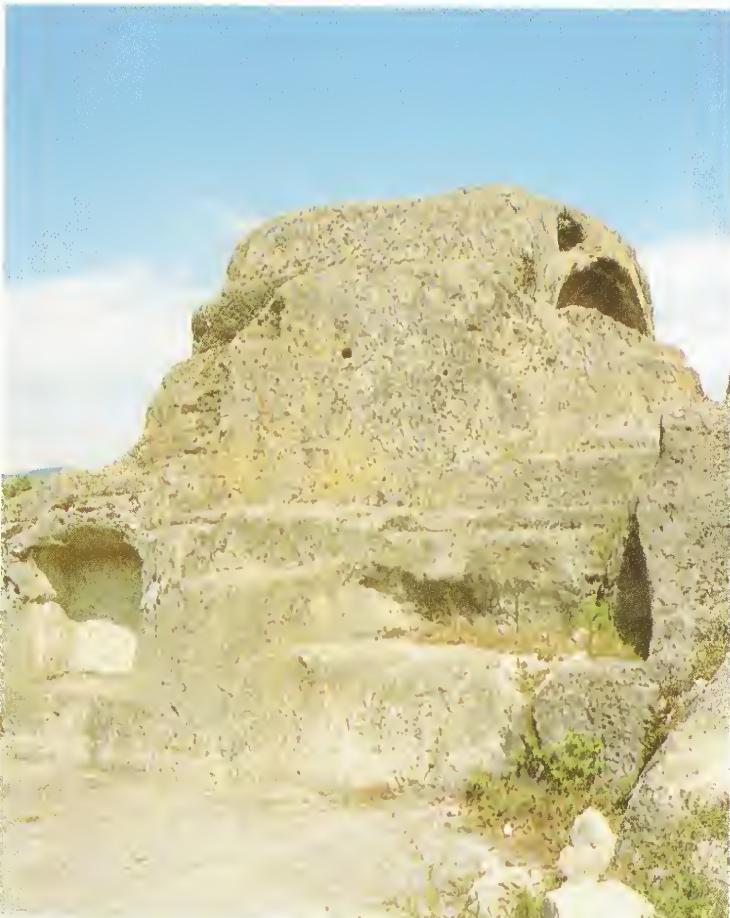
Discuses hewn from the rock-wall of the Thracian rampart at Topolovgrad, Yamboл region.



Thracian burial vault cut in the rock at the village of Tatul, Kurdjali region.

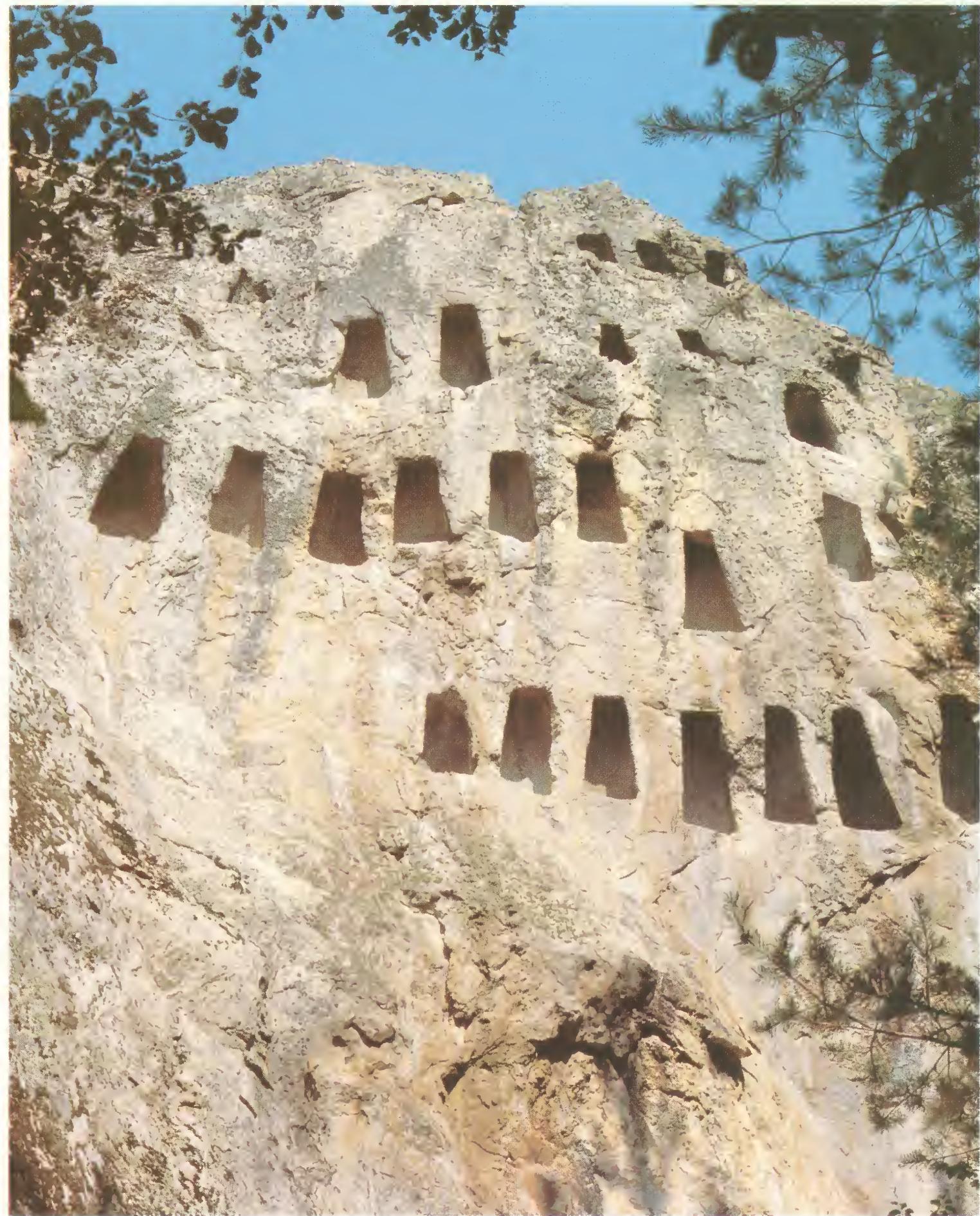
Early Iron Age recessed cliffs at Ardino, Kurdjali region.

Thracian domed sepulcher at Mezek village, Haskovo region.



changes of people, of political and cultural ideas and of technological information, too. All this, in turn, precipitated a revolution in the social and political life of Thrace and its people.

It seems that the social differentiation in Thrace has gained momentum and has given rise to the first class and social formations quite early (as far back as the latter half of the II millennium BC). This process comprised all Thracian tribes whose number was some several dozens. Their social structure was simple — the leader or the ruler who was also the supreme priest was at the top of the social pyramid. He exercised his powers aided by a retinue of aristocrats who ranked above the stratum of free community farmers and artisans. Bondage had not been widely practised in the Thrace economy, except for the limited royal domains where it was, but to an insignificant degree. This structure of the Thracian society remained unchanged up to the Roman Conquest of Thrace in the





first century AD, i.e. over a span of more than fifteen hundred years.

In the beginning of the 13th century BC, some Thracian state formations comprising the territorial and ethnic borders of the individual tribes are already mentioned by ancient authors with relation to the Trojan War. They were linked with the lands of Southern Thrace and were allies of the Trojans with whom, as it looks, they had economic, political and, perhaps, ethnic relations. Among the Thracian rulers in this zone, there lived king Rhesus who was famous for his influence, treasures and tragic fate. He was killed by Ulysses in his camp before joining the battles near Troy.

The political detachment of the Thracian tribes was preserved until the beginning of the 5th century BC. Then Theres, the chieftain of one of the tribes, the Wends, made a successful attempt at organising a unified Thracian state. Under his successors Sparadokus, Sitalkus and Sevtum (5th century BC), all Thracian tribes in

Thracian tomb at the village of Sveshtari, Razgrad region; UNESCO listed monument.

Eighth-century treasure of Vulchitran, comprising thirteen objects weighing a total of 12,425 kg.



The Panagyurishte Gold treasure. Phiale adorned with Negro heads.



present-day Bulgarian homeland had been united within the borderlines of the Thraco-Wendish kingdom. Allies of Athens in the Peloponnesian Wars, the Wends' rulers inspired with respect the adversaries of ancient democracy in its northern zones of influence by ensuring steady supplies of grain, raw materials and metals. Also during the 5th century BC, the Wends suppressed the attempts of Macedonia to come up the big political stage. However, in the middle of the next century (4th century BC) the Macedonians, headed by Philip and his son, Alexander the Great, took their revenge. The Wendish kingdom suffered severe blows and its borderlines shrunk into the relatively small region of the Upper Thracian Valley. New Thracian states enjoying brilliant, though transient, political success, those of the Bessae, Astae, Getae and the Dacean tribes, emerged on the Thracian political and battle scene in the quickly changing atmosphere between the end of the 4th and the begin-





ning of the 1st centuries BC. The endless scuffles for political domination between the Thracian family dynasties facilitated the invasion of Rome which, after a series of sanguinary wars and complex diplomatic combinations, succeeded in imposing its power on the Thracian people in the year 46 BC. Spartacus, the Thracian who rose the biggest uprising of slaves in the antique world and thus, nearly brought to the downfall of Rome, was captured in the vicissitudes of this nearly two-century-long resistance and was made a gladiator.

The Panagyurishte Gold treasure, dating from the third century BC. It consists of nine objects with a total weight of 6,164 kg.

Thracian bas-relief on rock from Sozopol, Burgas region.

The Borovo treasure. Silver rhyton with a sphinx-shaped base; fourth century BC.



ROME

Within the borderlines of the Roman empire most of the Thracian lands were structured in two big provinces — Moesia and Thrace. Apparently, both names have outlived the Thracians and even nowadays two of the three major Bulgarian historic regions (Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia) are still called by these names. The bloody decades of seizure of the Thracian lands were followed by peace and calm, and by years of construction. Soon the Thracians were declared fully-fledged citizens of Rome. Agriculture and cattle-breeding remained as the basis of livelihood in these lands and the manufacturing sector stayed in the hands of free farmers. The enormous latifundia of Italy employing tens of thousands of slaves were a phenomenon unknown in the Thracian lands.

During the first two centuries of their rule in the lands of ancient Thrace, the Romans embarked on the construction of well-designed roads. Some of these routes do indeed coincide with the European highway network of the modern times. Dozens of well-planned and well-built towns with well-developed craft industry (its social basis being again the free artisan association), cultural enterprises and a highly developed urban infrastructure, cropped up one after the other. The Thracians penetrated the state machinery, some of them reaching high administrative and military positions. They even made their way to the emperor's throne. The line of Thraco-Roman emperors began with the name of Maximinus (235-238), a Thracian farmer who climbed up the career ladder from the dagger of a tyro in the Roman legions to the warden of the Divine

Late antique tomb discovered at Silistra; fourth century AD.

Ancient fortress at Kula, Vidin region; third-fifth century AD.

Coin showing the Roman emperor Trajan (98-117).





Relief on marble from Messembria (present-day Nessebur, Burgas region), depicting a scene of oblation at a sanctuary; first century BC.

Ancient fortress-wall from Messembria (present-day Nessebur, Burgas region); fourth-fifth century AD.

Floor mosaic from public building at Esclus (present-day village of Guigen, Pleven region). Depicted is an act from 'Achaeans', a play about the Trojan War by ancient comic dramatist Menander.

Augustus very fast.

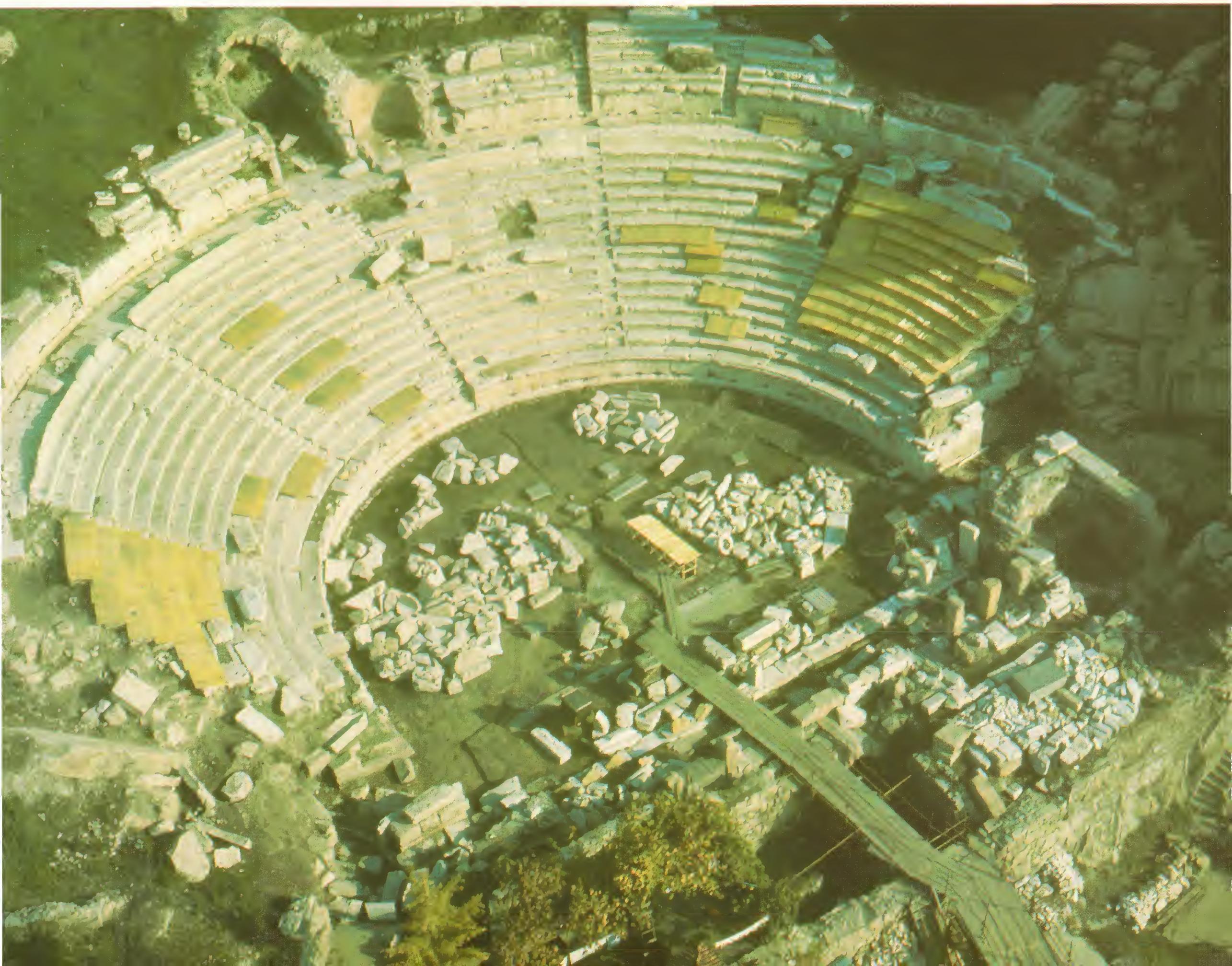
The almost idyllic picture of life in the Bulgarian lands got seriously overshadowed in the middle of the 3rd century AD. These flourishing parts of the Roman empire were swept by frightfully consistent waves of barbaric invasions, marking the advance of the Great Migration of Peoples. Tens of peoples coming either from the ice-frozen steppes and marshlands of present-day Russia or from the deserts of Asia, broke through the system of Roman borderline fortifications. On the incomplete columns of extant written and epigraphic records, Bulgarian historians have counted as many as 54 peoples 'assailing' those lands between the 3rd and the 5th centuries AD. Having worn down the resistance of the legions and the city garrisons, the barbarians began plundering the treasures in the provinces, dragging away the population and razing the resplendent Thraco-Roman civilization.



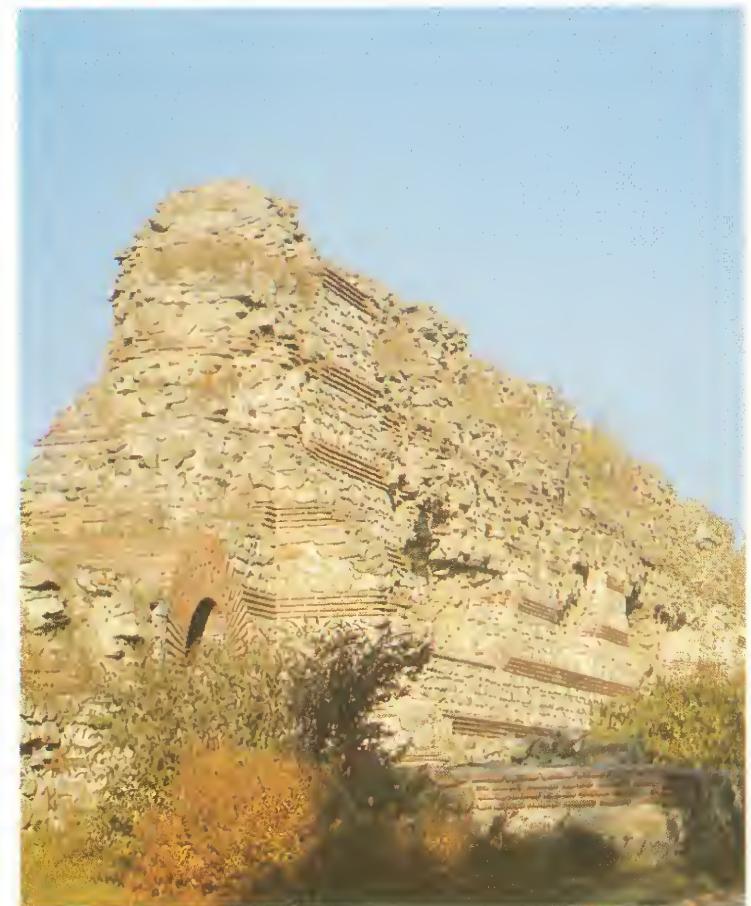
The Roman authorities made serious efforts to stop the destructive pressure exerted by the barbarians. Castles and roads were rebuilt and constructed anew and the barbarian tribes got down to settling as *foederati* in the devastated regions. These efforts doubled after the division of the empire into two parts and upon the establishment of the capital of the Eastern Roman empire in Constantinople. The Bulgarian lands appeared as an immediate hinderland to this city of one million population.

It appears that all this was in vain. The blows of the barbarians followed one after the other. At the beginning of the 7th century AD the ancient culture of Thrace and Moesia was destroyed and life in the still existing settlements rusticated and became barbarian-like. Having suffered considerable demographic losses, the Thracians literally disappeared from the stage of history. Only small groups managed to survive here and there in the high, unscalable

Ancient theatre at Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv); second-third century AD.







mountains or cared to withdraw to the big, well-fortified city-centres of the empire, beyond present-day Bulgarian lands. *De facto*, the power of Rome there was purely nominal and it was represented only in several of the city centres which stood out as isolated islands in the rough and wild sea warming with barbarians.

It looked as if those lands had not been fated to accommodate peaceful and creative life ever again. However, along the roads of the northern regions of the Balkan Peninsula, there could be heard the still indistinct steps of a people whose right, as assigned by history, was to bring the lands of Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia back to the bosom of the European civilization.

St George Rotunda in Sofia, dating from the third-fourth century AD. Originally erected in Roman and heathen style, the building was converted to a domed church after the adoption of Christianity.

Mural painting from St George Rotunda church at Sofia.

Ancient fortress-wall at Hissar, Plovdiv region.



THE BULGARIANS

Victorious Bulgarian warrior in high-relief on gold ewer; Nagy Sankt Miklos proto-Bulgarian treasure in Romania, ninth century AD.

The foundation of the Bulgarian state on the territories inhabited by numerous tribes speaking different languages, is definitely connected with the Bulgarians. It is purely for reasons of convenience and as a mark of distinguishing them from the Bulgarian nation formed during the 9th-10th c. on the Slav language basis, that contemporary historians call them proto-Bulgarians, ante-Bulgarians, Turko-Bulgarians or other similar names. They used to call themselves Bulgarians and so did the Byzantines and all other peoples who had known of them in those days. It is, therefore, more than appropriate that when referring to them, the narrative herein-after should use only the name Bulgarians. The Franks who had founded the France of the antiquity are, in fact, Germans, and the population there consists mainly of Gallo-Romans whose language is still the language spoken by the French. Nevertheless, French historians have never called them 'proto-French' or the like. The same is true for Russia where the tribe of Norman Russians, having nothing in common with Slavdom, is rarely, if ever, referred to in the Russian history as 'proto-Russians'.

* * *

Bronze amulet with a horseman depicted on it, found at the village of Sinyo Burdo, Vratsa region; eighth or ninth century AD.

The origin and the homeland of the Bulgarian tribes have been an object of both past and present study and research. They have generated and are still generating many hypotheses and violent disputes. This is most likely to continue for a long time to come. The





Gold belt tag with an oval semi-transparent stone set in the middle; eighth or ninth century AD.



Bronze rosette with runic signs inscribed on it; ninth century AD.

scarcity of clear and reliable sources could hardly be expected to be made up for. There is still one fool-proof fact which is that the Bulgarians' land of origin was in the highland regions of Altai in Siberia. Their language is related to the so-called Turko-Altai group. In other words, the Bulgarians belong to the same ethnolinguistic group as the Huns, the Avars, the Pechenegs and the Cumans, i.e., the peoples, parts of which are to flow into the Bulgarian nation between the 7th and 14th centuries.

The Bulgarian tribes seem to have been numerous enough, for large congregations of them started drifting towards Europe between the 2nd and the 6th centuries AD. The surges of migration worth noting are three. The Bulgarians were to suffer serious losses during the so-called barbaric raids against the Roman possessions on the Old Continent and in the inter-tribal feuds. Nevertheless, their demographic resources were sufficient to last them out in founding two powerful states, the one near the Volga and the other near the Danube, as well as to inhabit whole areas in other states, too.

As early as the 2nd century AD some Bulgarian tribes came down to the European continent, settling in the plains between the Caspian and the Black seas. In 354 AD they were noticed there for the first time by an European chronicler. In the so-called Anonymous Roman Chronograph, their border in the south was marked along the Caucasian ridge.

The snow-covered crags of the Caucasus were no deterrent for them. According to the Armenian historian Moses of Khorene, between 351 and 389 AD Bulgarian tribes headed by their chieftain Vund, crossed the Caucasus and migrated to Armenia. Toponymic data testify to the fact that they had remained there for ever and that, centuries later, they had been assimilated by the Armenians.

Swept by the Hunnish wave heading towards Europe at the beginning of the 4th century AD, other numerous Bulgarian tribes broke loose from their settlements in eastern Kazakhstan to migrate to the fertile lands along the lower valleys of the Donets and the Don rivers and the Azov littoral assimilating, in their turn, what was left of the ancient tribe of the Sarmatians. Some of those tribes remained for centuries in their new settlements, whereas others moved on, together with the Huns, towards Central Europe and eventually made their homes in Pannonia and in the plains around the Carpathians.

The Hunnish-Bulgarian association existed throughout the period between 377-453 AD — the time of the Hunnish hegemony in Central Europe. It is true that their name was rarely mentioned by the European authors of those times. The invaders, spreading like a dark cloud over Europe are identified with the collective notion 'Huns', but serious modern researchers are probably right in saying that Attila's combat power came chiefly from the mounted troops

of the Bulgarians. It is not fortuitous that when tracing back khan Kubrat's dynasty of statesmen, the ancient Bulgarians always put at the top of his genealogy Avitokhol and Erink, obviously identifying them with the famous Hun leader Attila and his son Ernakh.

Indeed, some West-European authors mention the Bulgarians even during that epoch. These were mainly accounts of battles describing them or their participation. We could only guess as to why did the Pannonian and the Carpathian Bulgarians not come to terms with the Longobards but the frequent wars between them are a fact. It is thanks to them that we know of the battle in which the Bulgarians had cruelly defeated the Longobards, slayed their king Agelmundi and took his daughter captive. Then Lamissio, the new king of the Longobards, hit back and defeated the Bulgarians.

The utter defeat of the Huns in the fields of Chalons-sur-Marne led to the dissolution of the Hun-Bulgarian alliance and to new,

Proto-Bulgarian Council of Boyls. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.





though individual, activities of the Bulgarians on the international arena. In 480 AD Byzantium signed its first agreement with the Bulgarians, hoping to use them as allies in its onerous war against the Ostrogothic invaders. The respect the Bulgarian troops enjoyed in those days can be felt in the enthusiastic eulogy by the Ostrogothic poet Enodius. It is about an Ostrogothic leader who has only slightly wounded a Bulgarian commander in a battle. This laudation describes the Bulgarians as supermen and as invincible warriors.

In 488 AD the Goths were forced by the Byzantines and the Bulgarians to move away from the Balkan Peninsula for good. The bad days for Byzantium, however, were still to come. During the 8-year-long campaign against the Goths, the Bulgarians being Byzantium allies, had been eligible to walking freely across Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia and they had evidently grown to like these lands.

There started the era of the Bulgarian incursions on the European possessions of the empire.

Only five years after the Goths had been driven out, the Bulgarian troops invaded Thrace, defeated the Byzantine army and killed their leader, Julian. Byzantium could sense the new frightful danger and emperor Anastasius I manifested unprecedented activity in the construction of fortresses. But in 499 AD a new attack of the Bulgarians led up to another humiliating rout — the whole Illyrian army perished in the battle by the river Zurta. In 502 AD the Bulgarians conquered and plundered all of Thrace. From 513 AD onwards the Bulgarian raids against the European possessions of the empire became annual, but from 540 AD a basically new feature became apparent: the Bulgarians were no longer satisfied with only looting and taking away the population from the rural areas, but adopted besiege techniques and started conquering the forts, too. Thus, only during the year quoted, in the region of Illyricum alone,



Silver-plated chain-armour from NE Bulgaria.

Balkan Mountains — central part of the range.



Chepina — medieval fortress found near the village of Dorkovo, Pazardjik region.



Medieval fortress at the village of Tatoul, Kurdjali region.

they managed to seize 32 of these forts and to carry away their population together with abundant loot.

It had become too obvious that if things went on like this Illyricum, Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia would soon be devastated and depopulated lands and, even before the turn of the 6th century AD, they would be inhabited by the Bulgarians instead. Byzantium was fortunate that its diplomacy had managed to instigate internecine wars between the two most powerful Bulgarian tribal branches, the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs. This temporarily stopped the Bulgarian incursions against Byzantium. The last one mentioned by the chroniclers was dated 562 AD. During the next five or six decades, the Slav tribes were to be the lucky ones to inhabit the lands of present-day Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian tribes' involvement in joint operations with other peoples would eventually disperse a great many of those who in-

habited Central Europe. Thus in 568-569 AD, when the Longobardic king Alboin conquered three big areas in northern Italy — Liguria, Lombardy and Etruria, the population that the king sent there did not consist of Longobardic tribes only, but also of Bulgarian allied tribes from Pannonia. The numerous Italian family names such as Bulgari and Bulgarini extant in northern Italy, have remained as a memento of the Bulgarians brought by Alboin and later assimilated into the Italian people.

Other Bulgarian tribes in the Avar khanate also took part in the Avar campaigns against Byzantium. In 631-632 AD they launched fierce battles to take over the supreme power in the khanate, but were defeated and 9000 of them left Pannonia and withdrew to Bavaria under the Frankish king Dagobert. It is not known why Dagobert welcomed them but later gave orders for them to be killed overnight. The surviving 700 families succeeded in escaping in bat-

Bozhenishki Ourvich — medieval fortress at the village of Bozhenitsa, Sofia region.







tle, crossing the Alps and arriving in Longobardy, where many of their compatriots had already been living. At long last they were well received and offered their first accommodation in the region of Venice but after the year 668 AD they had to move to the deserted coast of Ravenna, an exarchate in present-day Italian region of Campobasso. Two hundred years later an ancient writer, Paulus Diaconus, visited them and heard them speak Latin and Bulgarian. Naturally, as the years went by they had also been assimilated into the Italian people. Even today some regions in Rimini and Osimo are called 'the Bulgarian parts', 'the Bulgarian land', 'the land of the Bulgarian Baron'...

The Bulgarians living in the plains between the Caucasus, the Black and the Caspian seas preserved intact and even increased their human, economic and military potential. Despite the vicissitudes of fate, they were predestined to found the Bulgarian state.

Voukelon — medieval fortress at the village of Matochina, Haskovo region.

Bialgrad — medieval fortress at the village of Gougoutka, Haskovo region.



LIFE, ECONOMY, CULTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE BULGARIANS UNTIL THE FOUNDATION OF THE BULGARIAN STATE

It goes without saying that when the object of study is a period of nearly 700 years, all events can be presented only in progress. The development the Bulgarians had undergone over the 700-year span is truly unbelievable. They had quickly overtaken peoples with whom they had the same start in the Altai steppes, including their 'cousins' the Avars, the Pechenegs, the Uzes and the Cumans.

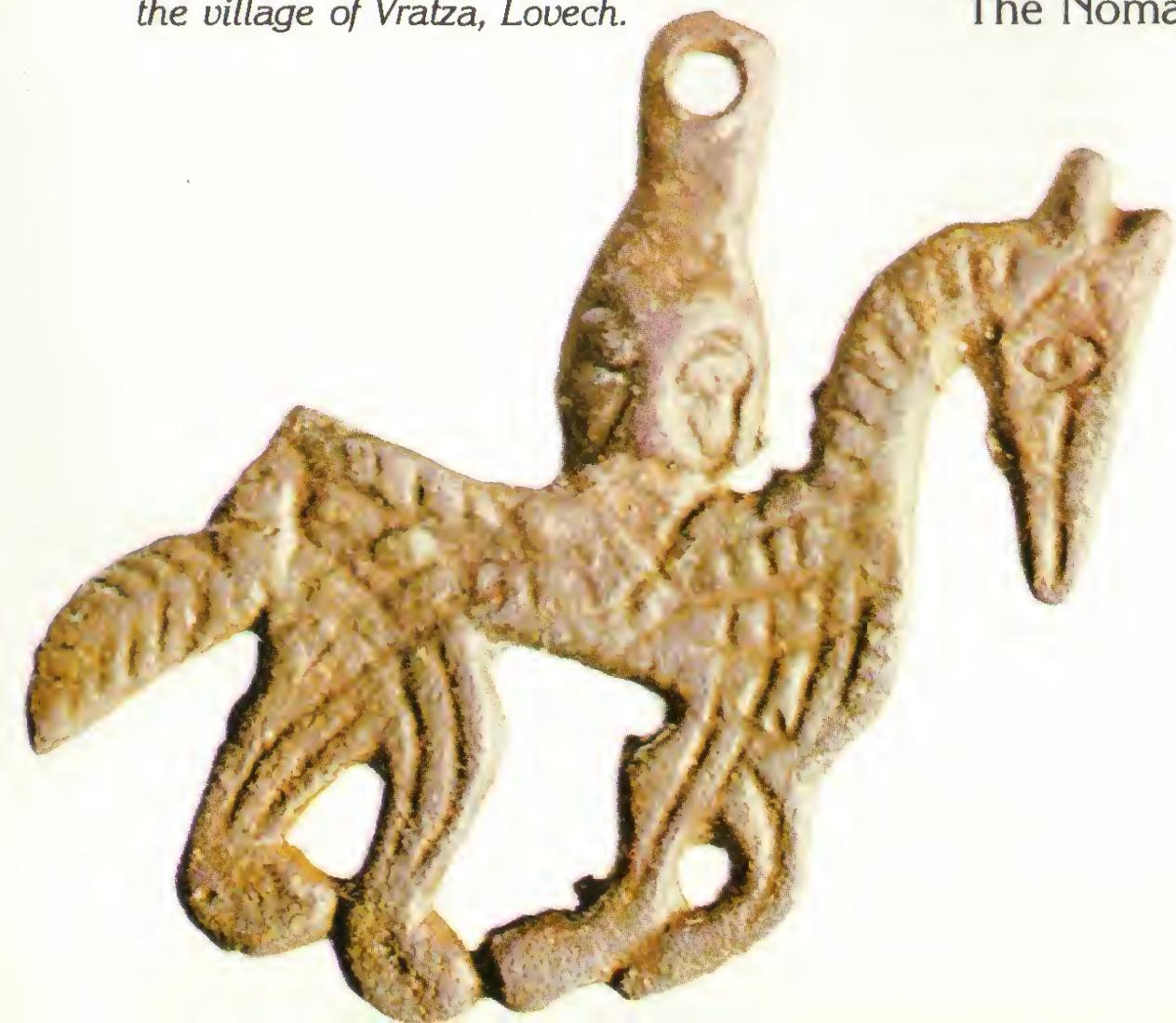
Undoubtedly, the Bulgarians used to be Nomads in their homeland. This does not mean, as many wrongly believe, that they lived on horseback and in carts or were travelling somewhere all the time. In the academic language 'Nomaddom' is a term which means a manner of production applied by peoples whose basic occupation is cattle-breeding. The Nomads, like other types of race, had permanent settlements where they used to spend winter only. During the remaining three seasons the men and the grown-up children used to move all the time with their herds along the territory of the tribe in search of pastures. Those engaged in cattle-breeding in the Bulgarian lands kept doing it up till the Balkan Wars. The women in the towns of Kotel and Zheravna, as is well-known, saw their husbands and their grown-up boys only from Christmas onwards, at most until the end of February. The rest of the time they spent with their flocks in Dobrudja. Similar was the situation in the towns of Smolyan, Shiroka Luka and Dospat. The only difference was that the men there used to take their sheep to Aegean Thrace.

The Nomad way of life was adopted by one hundred percent

Thick greenwood round Sozopol, Burgas region.

Lime-stone model of proto-Bulgarian yurt with graffiti on it from Devnya, Vama region; eighth-ninth century AD.

Bronze amulet showing a foal with a human head set on its back, found at the village of Vratza, Lovech.



of the population in the Altai, whereas in the new settlements — the north Black Sea plains and the Crimea, this percentage was considerably lower. The Bulgarians who had established themselves there for a period of 300 years, built big stone towns and forts, and developed substantial ore production and metallurgy. They needed significant, for the time, quantities of metal for arms and for agricultural tools. Yes, indeed, for agricultural tools, because archeological excavations have proved beyond doubt, that not a few of the Bulgarian population had begun cultivating the land, sowing and reaping. Moreover, some seeds discovered during excavations have centuries long selection aimed at obtaining high-yielding varieties.

The achievements of the Bulgarians during that time astonished even their contemporaries. In amazement, Armenian historians wrote that to the north of the Caucasus only the Bulgarians had stone towns while all other peoples were living in huts, dug-outs and tents. Metal production enabled them to arm and cover with shields not only the warriors but also their horses. Some skills and achievements of the Bulgarian physicians, e.g. complicated skull operations, or of the mathematicians, e.g. the surprisingly exact calendar, are highly admired by the respective experts even today.

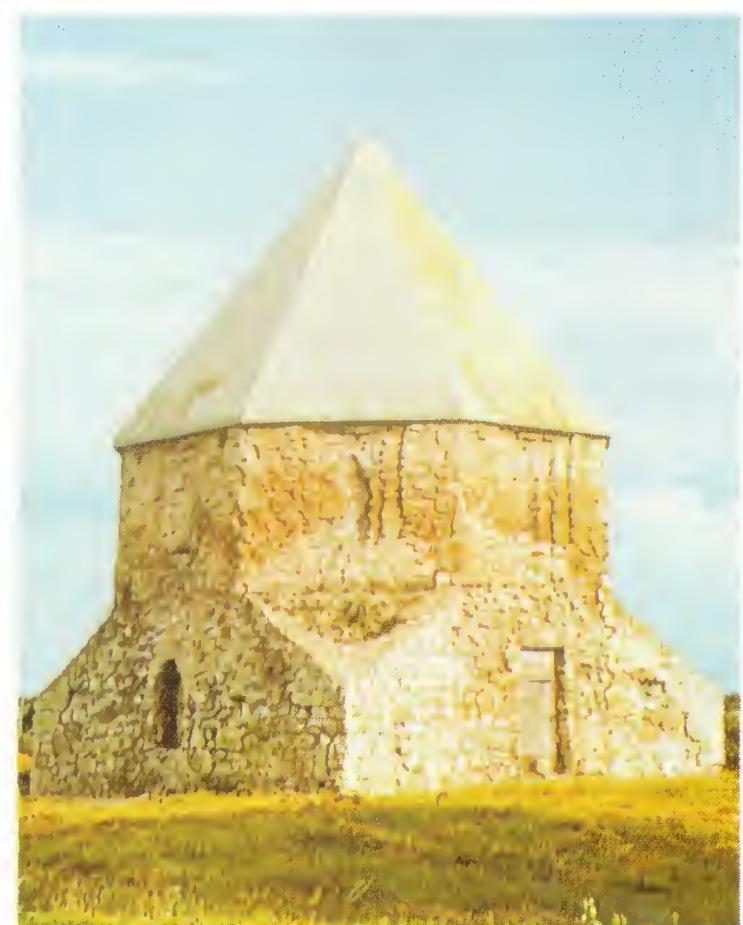
Indeed, the economic and technological advancement of the Bulgarians in comparison with other barbarian peoples, was neither due to their racial superiority nor to them being chosen by God. Both in the past and at present, there have been peoples who choose to shut themselves out, rejecting anything foreign, while other peoples are eager to adopt and develop further any borrowed ideas, cultures and technologies. Obviously, the Bulgarians were a people of the second type. Besides everything else, they had been lucky living where the borders of the world's greatest civilizations — China, India, Persia and Byzantium lay. It was from them that they learned to the full about everything useful in any sphere of life.

It is difficult to say anything about their type of race from the 4th century AD onwards. Present-day Bulgarians' general idea about their ancestors as short, crooked-legged mongoloids was never confirmed either by ancient written sources or by archeological excavations. Even the Byzantines who did not like them, had not written about such type of race among the olden Bulgarians. Ancient foreign writers used to describe the Bulgarians as tall and slender people with extraordinary bodily strength and stamina. An ancient Arab geographer even complained that ten Arabs could not fight one Bulgarian. Archeological excavations of Bulgarian necropolises in Pliska, Kiulevcha, Novi Pazar and in other sites, dating from the 7th through the 9th centuries AD have shown that the average height of the Bulgarians buried there was 1.75 m (five feet ten), whereas



Amulet with an animal depicted on it; ninth-tenth century AD.

Turret of a castle near the village of Bologari, Russia.





Gold jug, 36 cm high, an item of the treasure of khan Kubrat; Malaya Pereschepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.



the average height of the Europeans at that time was 1.60 m (five feet four).

Neither the height nor the physical strength of the Bulgarians spoke of anything unusual. It has long been proven that the height is in direct proportion to meat consumption and physical exercise. The large highly productive herds provided an abundance of meat for the Bulgarian menu while the military service and the hard labour in the fields gave them the physical exercise.

The Turks, as is known, are not mongoloids either. It is quite doubtful though, that even the Turkic race type had survived in the three centuries of settled life between the Caucasus, the Black and the Caspian seas. The infinitely open and flexible system of the society discussed hereinafter attracted a lot of people from other nations, who had been driven out or had run away themselves for various reasons. In the Black Sea littoral the Bulgarians assimilated thousands of Sarmatians and Scythians. On each of their numerous campaigns in Central Europe and to the south of the Danube, they kidnapped tens of thousands of men, women and children — Germanics, Slavs, Thracians, Romans and Greeks who were all gradually integrated into the Bulgarian society without a vestige of discrimination. Thus, talking about a distinct Bulgarian type of race at the time of khan Kubrat, the founder of the Bulgarian state, would simply be impossible. According to some linguists the name 'Bulgars' itself means 'mixture', i.e. a mixture, or a blend of people from different peoples.

The religion of the Bulgarians back in their homeland was animistic. The cult of the ancestors, quackery, shamanism and the faith in the supreme God Tangra merged all into one. However, in the community itself, there ruled a remarkable religious tolerance.

Both the archeological excavations and the documentary evidence testify that among the Bulgarians at the time of their settle-



Gold hemispherical clasp of horse-collar, an item of the treasure of khan Kubrat from the village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.

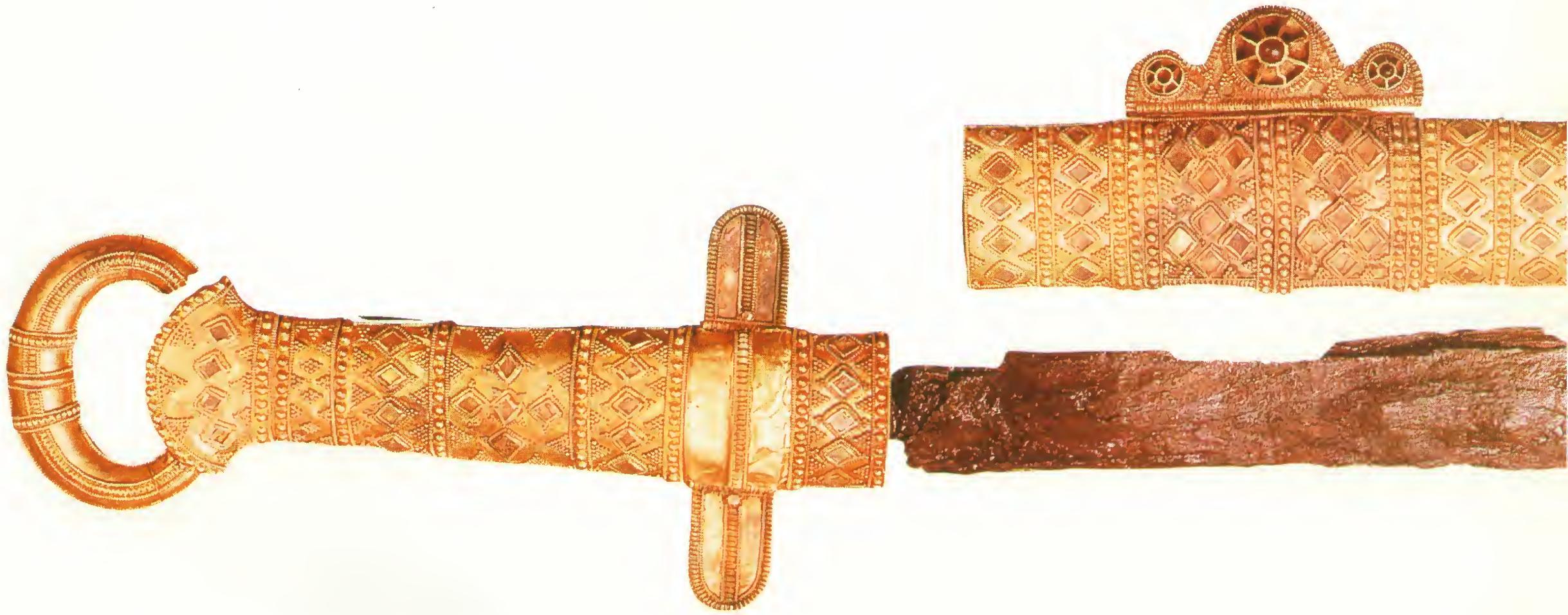
ment in the Black Sea littoral there had been Christians and Buddhists, as well as Jews. To all appearances khan Kubrat himself was a Christian, and so were other khans of the pagan period of the Bulgarian state.

Special attention should be paid to the military organization of the Bulgarians. The army consisted of all physically strong and battle-fit men but, in critical times, young women were also known to have been recruited. It may be from those days that we have inherited the currently popular view that he who has not done his military service is no real man. Stringent customary rules turned later into a law, stipulated the rights and obligations of the military men and, in many respects, that law is very close to contemporary army statutes. The troops were mainly horse-mounted. Besides the light cavalry which was customary with the peoples in the steppes, the Bulgarians had contingents of heavily-armed soldiers with both

Bronze amulet with a horseman depicted on it.

Broad sword; seventh century AD.





men and horses covered in chainarmour made of iron or felt. A blow delivered by the heavily armed cavalry (in khan Krum times at the beginning of the 9th century it was about 30 000-strong) could be compared with the effect of the blow a contemporary tank army would have on lightly-armed infantry divisions. In fact, the repeated Bulgarian victories over Byzantium were mainly due to the blows struck by the heavy cavalry. The Byzantine army had never had more than 400 heavily-armed warriors on horseback.

The armaments of the Bulgarians consisted of swords, battle-axes, knives and javelins for the heavy cavalry, and lances for the light cavalry, as well as of heavy bows and arrows.

Relying solely on their troops the Bulgarians managed to survive in the turmoils of the Great Migration of the peoples and then lived to see their sidereal day.

Sword and scabbard made of steel, gold and glass, items of the treasure of khan Kubrat from the village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.



KHAN KUBRAT AND THE BIRTH OF BULGARIA

The contemporary Bulgarian is obsessed by the notion that in the middle of the 6th century AD the Bulgarians living between the Caucasus, the Black and Caspian seas were conquered and then fell under the yoke of the Turkic khanate. This is not very precise and it is not true either, at least in terms of the modern definitions of the words 'conquered' and 'yoke'. The relationship between the ancient peoples and their rulers often had dimensions which could not be fitted into the parameters of present-day notions and interpretations.

The truth is that in 567-568 AD khagan Sildjibu, a supreme ruler of the so-called Turkic khanate (state type formation, established in the Altai region by means of uniting many Turkic tribes none of which could dominate over the others) forced the Bulgarians, the Khazars and the Belenzers to join his Turkish empire. The very nature of this state association excluded 'slavery' as an option for the Bulgarians. The Bulgarian tribal chieftains were neither killed nor driven away. They continued to govern their tribes. What was more, perhaps for the first time ever, they were able to see their tribes united. For, it is known that the Turkic khanate, though governed only by one ruler, was divided into eight semi-independent parts which were ruled by governors chosen from among their own people. For instance, such a governor was Gostun, mentioned in the Enrolment List of the Bulgarian khans. As early as 581 AD, as a consequence of the internal skirmishes for the throne, the khanate fell apart to form two separate khanates — eastern and western. The Bulgarians who found themselves in the western khanate had probably been, or had gradually become, the multitude of the population. Their leaders started fighting to attain the supreme power.

It seems that similar to their confreres in the Avar khanate, they did not succeed, but acted much more wisely. In 632 AD they united under Kubrat, leader of one of the tribes, broke loose from the khanate and then founded a state. Byzantine authors-contemporaries of those events, do mention a state, too. They even attribute it as 'Great'. Evidently, having observed it they noticed all signs characteristic of a state, i.e. borders, territory, economy, state structure, independent centralized rule and legislation. All these distinguished it from the tribal alliance which would, only provisionally, gather together in order to raid and plunder some province of the Byzantine empire or some other tribe which had also become rich

Khan Kubrat's gold signet rings found at the village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century.



from looting.

It can only be regretted that the historical sources lack any verbosity when referring to the first head of the Bulgarian state.

The earliest Bulgarian chronicle, the Enrolment List of the Bulgarian khans, informs us that he was from the Dulo clan. The chronicle of the Byzantine patriarch Nicephorus who lived a century later, states that he was Organa's nephew. As to who Organa was, it could undoubtedly be said that he was an important person the ancients had known but had failed to tell about. It is only logical to assume that he had probably been a proxy of the western part of the Turkic khanate, comprising Bulgarian tribes as well.

It is difficult to specify the exact date of khan Kubrat's birth. Another Byzantine writer tells us that in his childhood Kubrat was sent to Constantinople for reasons unknown. He grew up in the palace of the emperor. There he was baptized as a Christian. Com-

Gold medallion from Preslav.

Bronze amulet with two birds depicted on it; Veliko Turnovo.



paring the scanty data, the historians surmised that khan Kubrat had lived in Constantinople between 610-632 AD. The uncertainties concerning the reasons why, as a child, he had been sent to the capital of the Eastern Roman empire, can be reduced to two logical possibilities: to be made a hostage or to be given education as in the case of tsar Symeon who was sent there two and a half centuries later. Kubrat could not have been a hostage since the Bulgarian tribes did not exist independently therefore, the decision as to whether there would be war with Byzantium or not did not rest with them. If Byzantium were in any position at all to require hostages from the west Turkic khanate, it would ask for the son of the ruler. This leads to the only assumption remaining that Kubrat's famous uncle had sent him out there to study.

Twenty two years of one's life spent in Constantinople — the capital city of the European civilization in that remote epoch and



for some centuries after, could be experienced in many different ways. For example, one could easily indulge in the merry and care-free life bubbling over the renowned Constantinople pubs full of frivolous even wanton young women, some or most of whom were known to be from aristocratic families.

On the other hand, Constantinople was the home of rich libraries, antique heritage and culture, as well as of the moral and aesthetic values of Christianity — the state tradition of the great empire which had remained unbent and unshakable in the wilderness of barbarity.

Despite the absence of any information we should hardly have any doubt that Kubrat made use of the high-standard education he had received and which enabled him to devour both culture and state-building experiences. It looks as if no one has yet come to realize that Kubrat spent more time studying in Constantinople than Symeon the Great or Kaloyan did.

The novelists and screen-play writers who had often represented khan Kubrat as a primitive steppe chieftain, with filthy sticky hair and with the rustic manners of an uncivilized elder, would probably have to correct their vision of the first Bulgarian ruler — one of the most learned men in Europe at that time. His life and deeds are the most eloquent testimony to this last point.



Elongated tongue-shaped applique, part of a gold belt ornament; village of Madara, Shumen region; eighth century AD.



THE BIRTH OF GREAT BULGARIA

In 632 AD, according to the account of Byzantine chroniclers, khan Kubrat availed himself of the failing power of the Turkut khagan, shook off the vassalage his tribe was in, and declared himself an independent ruler. Virtually all Bulgarian tribes living in the region of the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Caspian Sea immediately united under him. The newly founded state-like formation was evidently not a military-tribal alliance as there had been no such legal category in the antiquity, but it was a state. As such, it had a strictly outlined territory, its own administration, uniform laws (probably based on the customary law observed by the Bulgarian tribes) and its own foreign policy. It is viewed as a state both in the Bulgarian historical records of that time and in the annals of Byzantium. The Byzantine statesmen and chroniclers referred to it as Bulgaria or even Great Bulgaria. It is no accident that about that time the individual names of all Bulgarian tribes were deleted from every page written by the ancient chroniclers. Bulgarians was the only name used thereafter.

No sources bear any evidence of the Turks counteracting Kubrat's undertaking. Obviously, the khanate did not have any military capacity to make the break-away Bulgarian tribes come back to their state. Apparently, the Khazars broke away in the same manner and at the same time.

The scanty information that has come down to us from Byzantine and Armenian chronicles makes it possible to determine, though with some doubt, the boundaries of Great Bulgaria: the lower course of the Danube in the west, the Black and the Azov seas in the south, the Kuban river in the east, and the Donets river in the north. Based on some suppositions is the information about the capital of Old Great Bulgaria. It was at the town of Phanagoria on the coast of the Azov Sea.

It is clear that khan Kubrat was a man who had acquired in Byzantium great knowledge about the structure and functioning of the state machinery and who, without doubt, tried to establish a perfectly workable administration in his new state after bringing it in conformity with the local conditions and tradition. Old Great Bulgaria was ruled by a khan who made the decisions after discussing them with the Council of the Great Boyls. His deputy, effectively the second man in the administrative hierarchy, was the kavkhan. The third man was the Ichirguboyl. Both of them were high-ranking officers in the administration and in the chain of command. In time



of war they were in charge of large army units. The practice of combining administrative and military responsibilities was applied to all ranks down the hierarchy ladder, too.

It is regrettable that the ancient records contain very little information about the domestic and international policies of Bulgaria in the reign of khan Kubrat. Raised and educated in Byzantium, baptized as a Christian and known as a personal friend of emperor Heraclius, the khan maintained peaceful neighbourly relations with the empire up till the end of his rule. In 635 AD these relations were impressed with a signature and a seal affixed to an inter-state agreement — an indirect act of recognition of the new state. Khan Kubrat was honoured with the title of a patrician. Judging by some events after Heraclius's death, we could say that khan Kubrat's friendship with the emperor was of a purely human nature, too. Running the risk of worsening relations with Byzantium, upon the death of the emperor in 642 AD, khan Kubrat supported his widow Martina and their children to whom he had been strongly attached, in their battle for the emperor's throne.

According to the Ethiopian chronicler Joan Niciusky, just the news of khan Kubrat backing up Martina and her children had risen in arms in their support the people and the army of Constantinople under a certain Jutalius, the son of Constantine. The Ethiopian chronicle also sheds light on the fact that khan Kubrat was already in conflict with some barbarian tribes along the border. However, his being baptized as a Christian helped his troops be victorious. This was most probably the beginning of the serious conflict with the Khazars who would later on, after Kubrat's death, tear away the eastern territories of the state and force khan Asparukh to seek territorial expansion and a city for a capital somewhere to the south of the Danube.

The war with the state of the Khazars was the second and last occasion on which the then chroniclers cared to record an event of the relations of the Bulgarian state with other states at the time of khan Kubrat's rule. The rest of the neighbouring peoples were rather loosely-knit to try their strength against the Bulgarians or to submit any claims to them. The Khazar state, established on the northern Caspian Sea coast, proclaimed itself a successor to the Turkic khanate and, on these grounds, claimed all its former lands and tribes in the east. However, it was they who formed the territory and the population of Bulgaria.

The conflict looked imminent and inevitable but its vicissitudes had regrettably never become known to us. Some indirect sources of reference, as quoted above, indicate that the raids had been beaten off successfully, at least up till Kubrat's death.

A close study of the text of a medieval legend, cited as an example of political wisdom, has brought out some information

Vessel from the proto-Bulgarian gold treasure found at Nagy Sankt Miklos, Romania.





about the Bulgarian public opinions after the long-lasting war with the Khazars. This is the legend which has come down to us from Byzantine chroniclers. It goes that at his death bed khan Kubrat bid his sons to break a bundle of vine twigs. None of them succeeded. Then Kubrat, himself, took the vine shoots and broke them one by one with his old frail hands. The moral was clear — as long as the Bulgarians and their political leaders are united, Bulgaria will be invincible. If they allowed a split or dissension in their community and in their actions, they would be destroyed one by one, causing Bulgaria to be swept away, too.

Wanting to give this lesson to his closest kin, khan Kubrat must have had serious doubts and worries about some trends in the Bulgarian political statecraft engendered by the Khazar invasion. And these doubts were well justified. The successful repulsion of the Khazar raids was at the cost of numerous victims and heavy losses for the economy. The Bulgarian lands were all plains offering no natural shelters, and thus being an easy pillaging target for the attacking Khazar cavalry. Perhaps hundreds of villages, crops and herds had been plundered or set on fire before the Bulgarian troops could locate, overpower and eventually destroy the Khazar invaders. Most Bulgarians were aware that their lands occupied a strategic position at the major junction of routes called the Great Road of the peoples migrating from Asia and Europe, and that even if the Khazar raids against Bulgaria were stopped and the Khazars completely destroyed, other peoples would soon rush to take their place at lightning speed. The developments that followed khan Kubrat's death indicate that part of the Bulgarians, or rather their political leaders, had insisted on the state being defended only within its existing territories (khan Kubrat had evidently belonged to that group, and his supreme power and prestige had those who disagreed with his policy refrain from action). Now, having long real-

Asparukh crossing the Danube. Artist Nikolai Pavlovich.

Gold buckle, an item of the gold treasure of khan Kubrat; village of Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.



ized that the prospects to keep these territories intact were very slim, they also began to insist on conquering new lands blessed with natural defence lay, natural resources and better climate. However, within that group there were also conflicting opinions: some of them insisted on looking for these new lands far enough from the Road of the peoples and from strong neighbouring state formations; the others were concerned only about the quality of the new lands and had no fears regarding any potential contenders of their possessions. As proof of the existence of such diversity comes the fact that upon khan Kubrat's death some Bulgarians set out to the north and founded a new state near the upper course of the Volga, while others extended Bulgaria into territories south of the Danube and moved the capital city there.

Kubrat died in 651 AD. It was once believed that this had happened in Phanagoria, the capital city of his realms. However, the new reading of a sumptuous burial, advanced by the German academic Joachim Werner, shows that Kubrat had died hundreds of kilometers further up to the north, in the present-day steppes of Ukraine. The German scholar's interpretation has also allowed to take a better look at the khan's last efforts as a statesman. It is worth devoting some space to the end of this great Bulgarian leader and to his last resting place.

In 1912 an exceptionally rich burial was discovered in the sand dunes of the Vorskla river near the Ukrainian village of Malaya Pereshchepina, 13 km away from the town of Poltava. The deceased was buried in a wooden coffin, set with 250 rectangular gold plates, 6.5x5.5 cm each. A considerable number of utensils made of precious metals (20 silver and 17 gold), arms inlaid with precious metal, a gold horn and a gold spoon — symbols of authority, 69 gold coins, a gold buckle weighing almost half a kilogram, gold rings, etc. were arranged around the body. The find obviously made its first researchers specify the burial as the last abode of not only a rich or high-born chieftain, but also the head of state of any one of the barbarian formations which had possessed those lands for any length of time.

The utensils were of no great importance for determining the precise 'age' of the treasure since they had obviously been collected over a 200-year period. However, the 'youngest' coins of emperor Constantine II of Byzantium were dated 647 AD. This gave clear proof that the burial had taken place after that date. Some of the pots, an integral part of the Christian cults, indicated that the man buried was a Christian.

The above facts alone lead to the conclusion that of all possible potentates who had ruled tribes or states in those times, khan Kubrat was the one corresponding to the archeological findings concerning the burial near Malaya Pereshchepina. In 1983 Dr W.

Seibt of the Byzantine Studies Institute in Vienna managed to puzzle out the monograms on the two gold signet rings as *Khubratu*, and *Khubratu Patrichiu*. There was no further doubt that in 1912 the Russian archeologists had discovered the tomb of khan Kubrat, the founder of Great Bulgaria.

The place of the burial which was in the furthest northern point of the state, hundreds of kilometers away from its capital, puts in a totally different light the last days in the life of the great Bulgarian. It now appears that he did not meet his death as a decrepit and sick man. As a matter of fact, if in 610 AD he was still a child, then in 651 AD the khan must have been a 55 or 60-year-old man in the prime of his life. It is only logical to assume that he was leading his troops to beat off another consecutive raid of the Khazars but, this time the latter were taken unawares and defeated at the very borderline. The burial itself attests the khazars' defeat and banishment. The specially made expensive coffin, the lavish burial gifts and the strict observance of the rites showed that the funeral had taken place in a peaceful atmosphere. If this were a defeat, the khan would not have been buried at all.

Then how did the Bulgarian ruler pass away? Was he taken to bed with a treacherous illness at the time of the combat march, or did he fall during the fight with a sword in his hand, or did he die of his wounds after the victorious battle? This, unfortunately, we do not know exactly, but in fact, it makes no difference whatsoever. Khan Kubrat died in a defensive battle, safeguarding Bulgaria. There is something else that has also been causing bewilderment: why was not the khan's body taken back to the capital and buried there with the same honours? And why was his vault erected on the border itself? It seems that khan Kubrat has had time before he died to oblige his commanders bury him there, right on the borderline. In this way, he had turned his last resting place into a defender of Bulgaria, too. The enemy could not afford treading unpunished a Bulgarian grave because they cherished high the cult to their ancestors. Thus, even with his tomb khan Kubrat put his successors under the obligation to defend the borders of Bulgaria into death.



Gold jug, an item of the treasure of khan Kubrat; Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.

Khan Kubrat's gold rings, items of the treasure at Malaya Pereshchepina, Ukraine; seventh century AD.





KHAN ASPARUKH – EXPANSION OF THE BULGARIAN STATE TO THE SOUTH OF THE DANUBE

After khan Kubrat's death Bulgaria suffered further Khazar raids. The Khazars succeeded in occupying the Bulgarian territories in the Caucasian region, the river valleys of the Kuban and the Don, as well as the Crimean Peninsula. Some of the Bulgarian tribes accepted their dependence on the Khazars, while others withdrew to the north, as far as the valleys of the rivers Kama and Volga. There they founded a big Bulgarian state, the so-called Volgo-Kama Bulgaria which existed up till the 13th century when it vanished under the smashing blows of the Tatars. Descendants of those Bulgarians are still extant in the present-day autonomous region of Chuvashia in Russia. In the early 70s of the 7th century khan Asparukh, khan Kubrat's successor, was already ruling over the realms between the Dnepr, the Donets and the Danube . After desperate defensive battles, he managed to drive the Khazars back across the Dnepr and to utterly defeat them, thus stopping their offensive westwards.

However, khan Asparukh was awake to his being unable to ensure a complete life for his state and for the people dwelling in the plains, the only surviving piece of Old Bulgaria — land infertile and marshy, short of natural shelters, ore deposits, and forests. It was for this reason that in the next few years the Bulgarian politicians also decided to undertake a territorial expansion campaign at the lands of ancient Moesia. According to Byzantine sources those lands had been to the Bulgarians' taste for quite some time because they were well-protected by the deep-flowing Danube in the north, by the rock fence of the Balkan Mountains in the south and

*Khan Asparukh crossing the Danube.
Artist Dimitar Gyudjenov.*

The Danube.



by the Black Sea in the east.

In those days Moesia, as well as the whole of the Balkan Peninsula were inhabited by populous Slav tribes. They almost succeeded in assimilating the native population as their presence there had lasted for nearly a century. Engaged in crippling wars with Persians and Arabs in the 6th-7th century AD, the Byzantine empire had completely lost control over its European realms. But from the middle of the 7th century AD, extricated from its solicitude in Asia Minor, Byzantium began reconquering the Balkan Peninsula. The disunited Slav tribes in Greece, Albania, Macedonia and Thrace were brought under the sway of the imperial power. With a view to resisting the Byzantine reconquest, seven Slav tribes inhabiting Moesia, entered into a military and political union but its chances to counteract efficiently the mighty empire were minimal as the Slav troops consisted only of lightly armed infantry.

In 680 AD khan Asparukh transferred a significant part of the Bulgarian army and population to the south of the Danube delta and took up the lands of present-day Dobrudja. Essentially, this move was equivalent to declaring war on the Byzantine empire. Common interests made the Slavs and the Bulgarians, both equally threatened by Byzantium, conclude a treaty under which the Slav tribes in Moesia recognized their dependence on the Bulgarian state and the latter committed itself to defend its subjects against attacks by any enemy coming from any direction.

In 680 AD, in the thick heat of the war between Byzantium and Bulgaria, Bulgarian cavalry and Slav infantry contingents struck a series of stunning blows on the Byzantine troops under the personal command of emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus. The military operations were shifted to Thrace. While the capital city of Pliska — the new state-administrative and political centre was under construction in the northeastern part of Moesia, the rumble of the Bul-

Pliska — the eastern gate of the Grand Palace.





garian cavalry reverberated more and more often over the hills off the Bosphorus. In the autumn of 681 AD Byzantium was forced to conclude a peace treaty with the Bulgarians. It recognized the detachment of Moesia from the empire and the Bulgarians coming to terms with the Slavs dwelling in Byzantium.

The structure of the Bulgarian state was changed to comply with the treaty between khan Asparukh and the Slav princes in Moesia. The supreme power was given to the Bulgarian aristocracy as recognition for its merits in the struggle against the external enemies of the state and the real military force supporting it. The state administration was headed by a khan whose power was hereditary. There was also a council of twelve great boyls representing the noble families. The decisions of paramount state importance were made by the so-called people's assembly — a meeting of representatives of all Bulgarian noble families and the princes of the Slav tribes dwelling in the Bulgarian state. The Slav tribes retained their internal self-government and the territories as specified in the treaty of 680 AD. Their obligation was to pay the Bulgarian central authority an annual tribute and to secure the military contingents in charge of the country's defence.

Pliska — the eastern fortified gate.

Pliska — underground backstairs passage in the Little Palace.



